STANFORD UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305

STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
Department of Genetics
(415) 497-5052

March 5, 1976

Mr. John E. Sawyer
President
Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
140 East 62nd Street
New York, New York 10021

Dear Mr. Sawyer,

I cannot tell you how gratified I was to get such a sympathetic hearing from you about the gap that has exercised me for many years, between medical education and the overall problems of human health. Besides what we discussed about the impact this has on policy confusion and misallocation of resources, I should also have added my concern that the basic sciences are becoming progressively more isolated from the practice orientation of the medical profession and at the same time have ever more to contribute with respect to understanding and ameliorating the health effects of the environment. For example, as important as our contemporary understanding of DNA is to the informed practice of genetic counseling and with dealing with specific cases of genetic disease, that knowledge is already far more important for what it has to tell us about environmental influences on the initiation of harmful mutations and their propagation through the human gene pool.

Our conversation was encouraging so that I will indeed be consulting with Dean Rich and with several of my colleagues here; and I will also be re-examining my own commitments. It is manifest that here at Stanford we should be working more energetically in this area and I am moved to return with somewhat more practical energy than before to trying to achieve some more tangible programs here. I will, of course, be in touch with you further about this before very long.

In our conversation we touched upon the identification of existing people and programs that you would want to know about in the general area of public health, and I will be back to you again with a more considered reply on these items.

In addition, I am enclosing some of the bibliographic material that I use in my course, which includes references to the WHO document on enviornmental health and to two reports of conferences sponsored by NAS and NIEHS. These last two deal more particularly with economically

oriented decision making in environmental health, but I am afraid you will find them more provocative than satisfying. Resources for the Future, in Washington, was a pathfinder in environmental economic analysis,but even there they have barely scratched the surface with respect to factoring in the health implications of environmental pollution. The work of Lester Lave (at Carnegie-Mellon) on the health costs of air pollution is probably the most ambitious and nearly successful attempt at cost benefit analysis in this field; and at that I imagine it will be respected more as having opened the field than for having reached permanently reliable conclusions. I do not think that anyone with any knowledge of the current situation is the least bit happy with the way in which priorities are set and decisions made in the field of environmental amelioration; and in many cases we have only a qualitative indication of the health benefits that might be expected even from enormous expenditures. When these are not immediately reflected in the federal budget, the issue of optimizing the allocation of resources is obscured even further. I will continue to be on the look-out for the few nuggets that may still be worth calling to your attention, at least according to my own lights, in this field.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr
Enclosures